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Agamben as and through Benjamin's Storyteller and Translator

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Abstract

Written in the form of a fairy tale dialogue, presented like a novella, here an attempt is being made to reduce the gap between that which is being said and that which is being referred to itself. It aims to breathe life into the hypothesis of Agamben appearing as and through Benjamin's Storyteller and Translator by presenting it in a state of becoming. The form is a nod to the spirit of the fairy tale in the work of both Agamben and Benjamin, and the dialogue to the importance of the oral tradition. Written in the form of a fairy tale dialogue, presented like a novella, here an attempt is being made to reduce the gap between that which is being said and that which is being referred to itself. It is aiming, to breathe life into the hypothesis of Agamben appearing as and through Benjamin's Storyteller and Translator by presenting it in a state of becoming.

Translator's Note

A few words on the mode of transmission: The essay is written in the form of a fairy tale dialogue, presented like a novella. Here an attempt is being made to reduce the gap between that which is being said and that which is being referred to itself, aiming to some extent, to breathe life into the hypothesis of Agamben appearing as and through Benjamin's Storyteller and Translator by presenting it in a state of becoming. To create "[a]pppearance which is no longer based on an hypothesis, but on itself, the thing no longer separated from its intelligibility",¹ a dissolution of the margins between the act of transmitting and the thing to be transmitted.² It is a nod to the spirit of the fairy tale in the work of both Agamben and Benjamin and the dialogue to the importance of the oral tradition. The works focussed on will be Benjamin's essays *The Storyteller* and *The Task of the Translator* and Agamben's *Infancy and History*, *Idea of Prose* and, to a lesser extent, *The Coming Community*. The singular focus on the primary texts ensures the necessary proximity to the original work for this purpose.

Threshold³

Once upon a time a philosopher called Giorgio Agamben sat with the Storyteller and Translator, like the angelic and demonic figures of conscience, one upon each shoulder, whispering the influence and wisdom of Walter Benjamin into his ears and helping him expound each dialectic uncovered.

The Storyteller was a creature drawn to humanity's infancy, to the purity of experience and was respectful of ritual; the Translator was a master of language, exponent of knowledge but whose mood was one of play and disruption. This is not to say their friendships

1 Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, transl. M. Sullivan & S. Whitsitt (New York: State of New York University Press, 1995 [1985]), 123.

2 Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, transl. L. Heron (New York & London: Verso, 1993 [1978]), 163.

3 'Threshold' is the title of the first and last chapters in *Idea of Prose*, reflecting the margins at the edge of the work and the necessary incompleteness of works and how one sits at the edge of another yet unwritten.

were divided by these natures, all aspects of the former were to some extent present in the latter, and the relationship between them was always both contingent and differential. Both would emerge through Agamben's theory of language and into his work itself.

Suffice to say, that having been subjects of Benjamin's essays some time ago, both the Translator and the Storyteller had felt assured of their respectively defined positions and often spent their days doing nothing more than seeing their reflections in Agamben's works and discussing them with each other at length.

I

The Storyteller sat at odds with the world on this day. "I live in fear of the imminent demise of all my storytelling kind. It is of little solace that it may be 'possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing'⁴ as when we are gone the outlook will be bleak indeed. My demise will be a private one as is the standard for our time, little grieving and only a sense of loss which will forever linger beyond expression."

"I know you have not felt quite the same since World War One, since things became more unsayable," said the Translator with eyes full of sympathy. "As Agamben has said of this idea that haunts you '[i]t is this non-translatability into experience that now makes every-day existence intolerable as never before.'"⁵

"Yes, the process of undermining the experience and the imagination began long before that though," said the Storyteller, "experience is no longer accessible to us.⁶ The relationship between experience and knowledge has changed, in place of experience there is science as knowledge, with experience a route to the end goal.⁷ Where stories, imagination and dreams once guided knowledge there is now empirical evidence, a general mistrust of experience. As the Storyteller I link to experience, that which changes people and brings wisdom, alas, this old type of experience no longer exists."

The Translator nodded, "we suffer from the pace of life and methods of communication that have increased the speed at which we disseminate. The vast increase of information presented has diluted both the power and effectiveness of the storyteller. People are given only facts shot through with explanations,⁸ no need to think, or question."

The Storyteller sighed. "My role is 'no longer a present force';⁹ perhaps this foretells the death of the storyteller, the death of the ability to exchange experiences. Eventually the notion of community itself will be no more than an abstract memory."

The Translator conceded. "I fear I lean towards a modern interpretation of knowledge, seeing experience as a means to an end. Translation is a retelling and not a direct connection, a 'mode of transmission' that can only carry information.¹⁰ Storytelling is an ancient art form. My role is not to abbreviate but illuminate experience. I am always at

4 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999 [1955]).

5 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 16.

6 *Ibid.*, 15.

7 *Ibid.*, 21.

8 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 89.

9 *Ibid.*, 83.

10 *Ibid.*, 70.

risk of succumbing to the traditional ideas of fidelity to the word; as opposed to licence of freedom for a faithful reproduction within translations.”

“To translate the object must be distinguished from the mode of the intention; not just to exchange the words in the language that most closely resemble each other; nor a code to be broken. There is a danger of fidelity to a text over-riding its essence. The importance

experience and creativity play in the role of the translator cannot be overlooked, so being distanced from experience is most damaging for my work also.”

They mirrored Agamben’s dialectic. The Translator hung tentatively to his knowledge, with care and a little suspicion and an envious eye on the experience of the Storyteller; the Storyteller clung to experience for dear life, all the time feeling the fatal tug of the current concept of knowledge.

II

As the Storyteller had said, the outlook was bleak if the move away from experience was to be completed. Both knew Agamben saw infancy as a logical starting point to understand the relationship between experience and knowledge,¹¹ whereby infancy does not suddenly stop existing and change to language, but coexists in origin with language, and is appropriated by language in the moment to create the human subject.¹² As such, the issue faced by our protagonists was that people cannot understand their experience through language, as language has distanced them from their own experience and connection with infancy.

The Storyteller turned to the Translator. “The story is the essence of what is to be said, the experience to be passed on, the unsaid and unsayable on the verge of disclosure; it may only be perceivable in a state of infancy that Agamben speaks of. The semiotics of language are ‘nothing other than the pure babble of nature’.¹³ It is my task as the Storyteller to break through ‘pure language’, to change it into discourse, or semantics, to create the story and communicate; it will be as if ‘for a mere instant human language lifts its head from the semiotic sea of nature.’”¹⁴

With a deep breath the Storyteller sat snugly back into a chair formed of a transcendental limit of language.

The Translator slouched upon the edge of infancy, “So I must begin not with the ‘babble’ but with the discourse created from it, that which is already in the realm of language as placed there by you as the Storyteller. I find the essence within this that can be conveyed in a truer form through another language, bringing it closer to being understood.”

As they sat, the translator at the edge of language looking towards infancy; the storyteller on the edge of infancy looking towards language, they pondered upon the insufficiencies of their tools.

“Language is viewed by both Agamben and Benjamin as inadequate. Despite this, any move closer to experience can only be achieved through language. As now we have it,

¹¹ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

language cannot be undone. You could not make it up! If it were not true in the first place, there would be no language from which it could be made," the Storyteller bemoaned.

The translator mused. "Without our imperfect language we would be like animals, without history, beings of pure communication.¹⁵ It is the mere fact we are discontinuous,

that we have come from a place of no language to a place of language that causes this disruption and gives us our history, this disruption is our history and infancy is its essence."

"The similarity between languages lies in their intention, their essence. Through translation a higher hidden meaning of an original text or story can be realised, we should not abandon seeking an answer in language when translation could provide a route to 'pure language'.¹⁶ It is true that Agamben states that '[i]n and through language the individual is constituted as a subject'¹⁷ but he also notes that it is only through language that the subjectified individual can be liberated."

The storyteller considered another stance: "Benjamin states it is not possible to translate a translation; but surely a truly brilliant translation would be a truer representation and bear translation to another language without loss of essence? The newly translated work would form a dual basis for translation alongside the original. For an individual fluent in both original languages, it would surely be an aid to take this truth of experience to the next level."

"Indeed," echoed the Translator. "All languages are translations of each other and all high language is a translation of lower ones.¹⁸ We are constantly translating translations, whether we start by interpreting the 'pure language' of infancy or the human language of semantics and semiotics. We can view the poetic legacy, the story, as beside infancy at one edge of language and translated prose as language at the other edge, however, they are as inseparable as the story and the translation; each story is its own translation, each interpretation of a new translation changes it into a new and original story as it comes into reality."

The Storyteller sighed, "While we view Infancy and Language as a self-referential cycle, with each originating each other, this circle as a starting point, we now can view ourselves as Storyteller and Translator caught in a similar self-referential cycle."

Tired and frustrated, and feeling momentarily very unpoetic, the Storyteller stretched out towards the centre of language reaching ever closer to infancy but could not quite touch it without letting go of its transcendental linguistic chair. The Translator swung back in the opposite direction on the other chair, pushing at the boundaries, and edging back little by little.

"Our self-perpetuating cycle has a temporal aspect also," said the Translator. "Our relationship can be seen in how Agamben explains the sacred (or the ritual) and play. 'Everything in play once pertained to the world of the sacred';¹⁹ all in translation once pertained to the story. The translator links to play and the storyteller to ritual, the fidelity

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1913-1926* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 52.

¹⁸ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 74.

¹⁹ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 79.

to the word (ritual) can lead to poor translation, and ritual is more linked to a faithful replication of the essence (as you do in your stories), translation requires leaning towards play, creativity with language and a removal of existing boundaries.”

“I guess,” said the Storyteller “that storytelling is the sacred element of the ritual, creating the original text. The translator is a potentially chaotic element, a disorder or subversion of the original text.”

The Translator related this back to time. “So the temporal aspect of translator and storyteller as diachronic and synchronic parallels that of ritual and play.²⁰ You as the Storyteller are the ‘origin’ of the synchronous original and I as the Translator of make the original an original through diachronically placing something that is not the original but an altered copy in its place within a given timeline. I disrupt the synchronic and create the diachronic time. Translation recreates the original at a new historical moment, it interrupts the synchronic eternal time which the Storyteller creates with the language of the story and interrupts it was placing it in a linear diachronic time.”

So the closer the Storyteller and Translator moved closer together in terms of ritual and play, the closer to experience they reached. The further apart they stretched, the greater their isolation from pure language and the truth of experience. The time had come to move beyond their ponderings and into the world to test their hypotheses.

III

They journeyed, and during the long days and nights they spoke with few others, picking up traits from each other. In many ways the Storyteller’s language became more translatable, the Translator reached deeper, relaxing back into experience and disrupting the dialogue with greater regularity, and the Storyteller succumbed to a richer use of text. This life become one of movement and travel. They were often being invited as guests to provinces with customs different from their own, following Agamben through the creation of disruptive legacies manifesting between poetry and prose.

For the space of a week they passed through a place that was ever so silent; an abundance of soft clay and marble categorised its geology. Arrays of small delicate figurines and huge statues filled the valleys ahead, fine fingered residents worked and reworked the softer elements of the landscape in a matter of seconds, meanwhile exchanging soft smiles, angry glances or wry grins in response to the alterations they saw at each other’s hands. Shelves full of intricate models, these three dimensional tapestries of great beauty held in vast archives documenting historical moments.

The Storyteller’s spoken and written expressions of experience were rejected here. The harsh brogue of the spoken word was not welcomed, and there was not a glyph in sight.

The Translator was to be a useful companion on these voyages. “They may create their history of experience sequentially but they do it such that they can view it as one. Language is a semiotic system which has been broken through by semantics to form discourse; these forms we are discussing are no exception. Your stories must be re-expressed this way also to become their stories. It is important”, said the Translator, “to acknowledge that ‘language in such contexts means the tendency inherent in the sub-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

jects concerned.... toward the communication of the contents of the mind',²¹ the form this takes can always be translated into another."

Beyond this place lay the distant lands of spoken and written language that was often abstract, symbolic and florid, sometimes inconsistent and emotive, sometimes rhythmic and uplifting, often hinting at unlocked secrets just at the edge of our understanding in aesthetically pleasing or challenging ways. Agamben stopped here for some time, for the Storyteller was at home here. The legacy of these aphorisms, fables, poems and anecdotes increasingly recognised as incipient features of Agamben's form and content.

The people in this land were purposeful and dedicated to their poetic vocations, but, for Agamben, the vocation of the poet necessarily involves an act of faith to convey something that is indeterminable,²² to express (in a sense) the pure experience. He posed the riddle of how the poet can have a vow of faithfulness to their profession if they are unable to formulate exactly what the vow is to convey.

The Translator with him sifted through medieval glossary notes, which showed the word for 'forgotten' being defined as being passed over to oblivion, and notes from Hölderlin's translation where he states that god and humanity 'in order that the memory of all the heavenly ones not vanish, communicate in the form, all-oblivious, of infidelity'²³.

"The 'form of infidelity'", said the Translator, "is one which tries to access the impossibility of oblivion where all that has been forgotten resides. The '[f]idelity to that which cannot be thematised, not simply passed over in silence, is a betrayal of a sacred kind, in which memory ... [uncovers] oblivion'.²⁴ This is to imply that the poet's vocation is to dedicate one's work to something that is undefinable, and cannot be categorised, yet is so vivid that it cannot be ignored, it is to use one's mind as pure potential to access oblivion at the same time as the unforgettable to 'hold intact to identity of the unrecalled and the unforgettable'."²⁵

"Here the work of the poet," said the Storyteller, "their vocation, is the identity that sits at the intersection of what is unsayable, an access point or anchor to that which we cannot remember, yet is ever present, in the space of oblivion where the forgotten resides. Through pulling the past explanations into the poetic moment of his writing in *Ideas of Prose*, Agamben allows the past explanatory writings to interrupt the current poetic writing, translating it into a current piece of creative prose."

As such Agamben placed a context on the expression of the poetic community, placing their purpose in a philosophical context.

His work done, the group of transcendental travellers moved on to heavily populated towns and cities. Here interlocutors discussed all in terms of finance and power relations, complexities of markets resulted in ever more technical terminology, the legal and technical philosophical jargon stretched to the thinnest of understanding, even among those who created and guarded it. In these metropolises lay harsh lessons and many plots to invade and conquer the distant lands from whence Agamben, the Storyteller and

21 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 62.

22 Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 45.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

the Translator had just come, to obliterate these subtle forms that make few claims to the absolutes and often seemed aimless beyond the purpose of expression itself.

All three were horrified at this idea. It would appear the people of the philosophical and political urbanised worlds had forgotten the legacy of the language they spoke but, with some encouragement, they were persuaded to hear a story...

The Storyteller harked back to the Glosses of *Infancy and History*, to the interpretation of Tieck, *Life's Superfluity*. "In this short story a young couple with no money burn a ladder connecting their room with the rest of the house for heat. The ladder represents experience, the elimination of which is 'a philosophy of poverty imposed on them by fate... when the only possible experience is horror or lies.'"²⁶ The Storyteller explained, "This signifies giving up all experience because of the nature experience has taken on. It is like drug use, a symptom of that which no longer brings new discoveries and experiences in a transcendent way but only serves to makes people less aware of the experiences they are having in the world, as they wish to withdraw from the unpleasantness of life."²⁷

The Storyteller thought Agamben's renewal of this literature through his work would set it in the modern vocabulary of philosophical prose, hereby giving it a second life in the historical moment of these people. At the same time, through the retelling of the story, the poetic legacy of the philosophical ideas, and the harmony created between the two, they could create a new understanding. Hereby pushing the language of prose closer to the truth of understanding experience, bringing text from one language into another, closer to 'pure language' and to the unsayable essence of the intention.

"This story," said the Storyteller to the people of the cities, "is the poetic legacy of your modern day experience, this surrounding philosophical prose embeds and harmonises ideas to give a greater understanding of the essence to be conveyed. You do not have to invade or rid the text of the poetic to keep its meaning, but let your own translation enhance it," the Storyteller stated, derailing, at least momentarily, their desire for the invasion and destruction of the poetic realms and allowing them to continue on their journey.

Arriving at an island some distance outside of Europe now, the travellers had no doubt that circumstances here would be influencing Agamben's political philosophy in progress. Determined to get the most out of his experience on the island, the Storyteller headed off towards some officious looking men. They had a prisoner in tow. Surely, they must know the history of this place, or at least a popular version of it, the Storyteller thought. The Storyteller felt that their story would provide an understanding of this place that would allow their understanding to move closer to the truth of experience of this colony.

The Storyteller followed them to a small, deep, sandy valley where a strange apparatus lay. Straining to listen to the description of this apparatus, the Storyteller learnt how it punishes people by writing the law a perpetrator has broken on their body, then slowly cutting into it into them repeatedly until they die. Appalled by this, the Storyteller watched from a distance as the prisoner was set free and the officer climbed into the

²⁶ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

apparatus to be impaled, killed and then dumped into the pit as the machine started to come apart.

Strangely compelled by this, keen to see the linguistic sentences on the apparatus diagrams (and how these could have merged into the legal punitive sentences) the Storyteller called out to the remaining people to reveal more of the story, running around the edge of the pit and towards them. "Please!" The Storyteller cried out, "I could barely hear from a distance, how when using this machine does one distinguish where life ends, and the law as form of language, begins?"

Tripping and tumbling, the Storyteller fell, ensnared in the malfunctioning machine, and the more the Storyteller spoke of the law and its ritual of death, and called to the traveller to explain a way out, the more it drew the body of our protagonist in, breaking skin, imploding and suffocating. The others had no interest, the prisoner and soldier left, the Commandant lay dead in the pit already and the other traveller was strangely aloof and unaware of his presence. The Storyteller felt death was immanent; to have become a protagonist was to tempt fate. Agamben would translate such an apparatus of torture as language; 'primarily a machine of justice and punishment. This means that on earth and for men, language is also such an instrument.'²⁸

The Translator had followed the Storyteller over the hill and to the valley and said: "Agamben actively identifies Kafka as being a writer who 'made the margin between truth and transmission their central experience'²⁹ and as such the poetic legacy of his work is translated into the moment of this political philosophy and this moment is one of great danger for our Storyteller!"

The Translator pulled the Storyteller from the machine; the Storyteller lay still on the floor. Feeling for a pulse and a hint of breath the Translator breathed deeply into the lungs of the Storyteller. The Storyteller stirred and spluttered back to life, blinking, not knowing who it was that had truly been responsible for the revival, as this was not the Translator but Agamben in his guise. Pulling the Storyteller to a seated position Agamben said, "[w]hat the condemned man thus manages to grasp in the silence of his last hour is the meaning of language."³⁰ He sounded almost envious.

What the Storyteller had experienced was law becoming the fact of life, the reality of the language of law becoming death through the inscription of commandments by the machine upon the body, eradicating the boundary between law and life itself. Unsurprisingly, the Storyteller was startled, "it would seem that Agamben truly comes to the position of the Translator; finding harmony between his language of philosophical prose and their poetic legacy, revealing a truer essence to the reader."

The Storyteller continued, "by translating the poetic legacy into the moment of his philosophical work he has linked theories to their history expressing the central reciprocal relationship between them, 'crediting them with life'³¹ much to my benefit. His work as the translator became imbued with meanings inherent in the poetic legacy in an active sense, translating their meaning implicitly even when his works do not have an explicit

²⁸ Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 115.

²⁹ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 164.

³⁰ Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 116.

³¹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 72.

reference in that moment of his writing. It is realised in a tone of semi-comedic tragedy that permeates both *Idea of Prose* and *The Coming Community*."

"Perhaps it is time to cease our travels, to find a home," said the Translator. "It is unlikely that any of these places will suffice for Agamben, intent on merging terms from different languages into his explanations, having a role as a literal translator between these languages, the intended ideas." The Storyteller was uninterested in such aspects, content that translation of the poetic legacy was an integral part of Agamben's work, a key to the survival of storytelling, both in political and philosophical writings and in his prose that presents in the realms of fables, aphorisms, and short stories. The Storyteller realised that these went beyond analogy and example but were the source of his explanations in a way that was self-aware, fundamental and translated between these genres of writing to produce a language that brings us closer to an understanding than would be possible without their integration.

IV

It was time to reflect on their experience, and the Translator began once Agamben had fallen asleep. "Clearly the comparison drawn here is similar to that between the Poet and the Translator, whereby the poet is seen as graphic, primary, spontaneous, inside language, aiming for representation of meaning, and the work being and end in itself; where the translator is intentional, ultimate, derivative, outside language, dealing with the totality of language, aiming for an echo of original and where the work is a point of departure."³²

The Storyteller saw a likeness reflected. "Agamben knew that '[i]t must now pass into the hands of poetry',³³ that the Storyteller must be kept alive. In both *Idea of Prose* and *The Coming Community*, there is a return of the simple forms harking back to older times: fable, riddle, aphorism, poem, short story. Writing between poetry and prose – in Agamben we are seeing a re-emergence of a storyteller. He has not strayed into the realm of the novel as his form, although he is telling a story, in fact many stories."

"For Benjamin an important part of life is death. People are detached from death; it is no longer a time for people to meet and discuss, reflecting on death brings people closer to an understanding on their own life and this is lost.³⁴ Agamben views death as the limit of experience.³⁵ The importance of death in Agamben's works between poetry and prose mirrors the importance of death in the work of any storyteller. This signifies a return to speaking of true experience and reconnecting with life and infancy. In *Idea of Prose* over quarter of the chapters feature death directly,³⁶ including the chapter title for one being *Idea of Death*."³⁷

"He understands the 'art of repeating stories'³⁸ in a new context walks a fine line be-

³² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 77.

³³ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 167.

³⁴ Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 93.

³⁵ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 23.

³⁶ These chapters being: The Idea of Matter; The Idea of Study; The Idea of Communism; The Idea of Politics; The Idea of Share; The Idea of Happiness; The Idea of Thought; The Idea of Language II, The Idea of Death.

³⁷ Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 129.

³⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 90.

tween the roles of the Translator and Storyteller." The Translator noted, "are his stories in line with the practical nature that defines the true nature of storytelling, does it provide counsel for its readers?"³⁹

"Yes, for instance, *Idea of Prose* begins with a historical parable⁴⁰ featuring the last scholar of the School of Athens, Damascius who was to write his work called *Aporias and Solutions Concerning First Principles*. This he intended to start by identifying the 'single and supreme beginning of the whole'. He becomes frustrated but eventually he realises his starting point must not be to grasp hopelessly at the unknowable but to realise the potentiality for representation, a tablet upon which nothing is yet written. The lesson Agamben draws us to at the end is that the true discovery was not external but a realisation about oneself that you must come back to your own internal experience before you can start to understand further. He also provides a maxim (which I dare say Benjamin would be highly approving): 'That which can never be first let him glimpse, in its fading the glimmer of a beginning.'"⁴¹

"We must also consider *Idea of Happiness*.⁴²" The Storyteller said with a wistful look in her eye, "That is one of Agamben's fairy tales, a brief fable, 'in every life there remains something un-lived just as in every word there remains something unexpressed',⁴³ so it begins with a Benjaminian aphorism, a nod to the mentor, the implied 'once upon a time'. A story of a life cycle: from birth to death in two mere paragraphs. Language is the heroine, the character of humanity; the damsel in distress, and death in the form of the grim reaper is our clownish villain cheated from the prize. Few words to evoke much thought; in a world of excess such restraint."

"It is said: The art of storytelling is to keep it free from information⁴⁴", the Storyteller was excited, "in *Idea of Prose* and *The Coming Community* the presentation of the story often offers little explanation beyond a sometimes cryptic aphorism, as in 'Pseudonym'⁴⁵, a piece of prose where language self-consciously plays a starring role. A story of betrayal, where language is used as a mere machine but then redeemed and placed in a referential place where even though it is impossible to truly express something using language that this in itself has a beautiful fascination. It borrows from the imagery of Kafka's apparatus in the Penal Colony and it ends in the delicate understated optimism of a Walser quote 'fascination of not uttering something absolutely',⁴⁶ the distrust of language is turned into a sense of wonder and modesty.⁴⁷

Within this piece there is a story, not handed to us shot through with experience, but delicately crafted so we must read between the lines and absorb them into our selves, changing as we take time to understand the dialogue within."

39 *Ibid.*, 86.

40 Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 31.

41 Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 36.

42 *Ibid.*, 39.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 89.

45 Giorgio Agamben *The Coming Community*, transl. M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 [1990]), 59-60.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

“So, it would seem, the only sense in which my kind are dead or dying,” said our Storyteller, with some indigence and a little relief, “is the sense in which I am a protagonist in this story, this story which can be no more than a Death Mask for unpened works.”⁴⁸

So, in the differential margin between diachronic and synchronic time, the Storyteller and the Translator lived happily ever after...

Threshold

The unwritten work here⁴⁹ is the story of the rise of the Storyteller. It begins in the world now; people are unfamiliar with this dialogue, separated from and fearful of death and experience. It is a place of white noise, technology moving faster than our comprehension, transmissions that say nothing and modes of transmission that transmit nothing.⁵⁰ Although the storyteller exists, who has time to listen? Where is the space for experience to be regained? Will the translations, by their unfamiliar sounds in known languages, push at the boundaries to elevate and to draw attention? Or will they perplex and ostracise through their obscurity of form? Even then, if the story itself in the moment is heard, it is perhaps but an interruption. It is not this moment or many moments of hearing that are the end goal; they are but the beginning and opening up of the potential for beginnings.

We must seek a blurring and reduction of the margins that have been created to keep us from the truth of experience. When Agamben sets out at the start of *Infancy and History* he speaks of the denial of experience with a hint of optimism, “[p]erhaps at the heart of this apparently senseless denial there lurks a seed of wisdom, in which we can glimpse the germinating seed of future existence”,⁵¹ in this place of germination the new text begins.

There hesitates ahead unwritten work, which gleams a new understanding of the role of radical thinkers and writers, as having a place in the differential margin between the Storyteller and the Translator, and between poetry and prose. Perhaps today we can at best hope to oscillate briefly away from translator to storyteller, never staying for long, constructed as it currently is as a place for the most basic and inept of translators, a place for interpreting the presented-as-obvious uncritically. We broke into the world of language as storytellers and because of this it is always with us. That break is the root of our curiosity, our desire to return and understand that which is beyond the tools of language. It drives the creation of translation upon translation until an original voice breaks through into a new story.

The perceived death of the storyteller by Benjamin is part of a process; it is taken to this limit as part of a dialectical struggle attempting to rescue us from isolation from our own experience, by and through language. This process reaches ahead of us pre-empting a realisation where the only way we can place the storyteller back in the centre of society is to rekindle the imagination, speaking in a language that has arrived closer to the truth of experience through its multiple translations.

⁴⁸ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

As Agamben transcends his role to interrupt the role of storyteller with the role of the translator, so then the translator with the storyteller, writing between poetry and prose in such books as *The Coming Community* and *Idea of Prose*. The playful work breaks through the ritual of the sacred stories and over-fidelity of translations entering into an 'interdisciplinary discipline'⁵² and challenging the "vulgar concept of time as a continuous and infinite process"⁵³ which distances us from a primary experience of time and history.

Far from storytellers having died off, they are being reborn at the edge of language and its use. In the realms and in the body of the philosophical translator, these roles are inter-dependent and perpetuate the existence of each other. Between ritual and play, poetry and prose, at the edge of translation and language, the storyteller is reborn and strives towards the centre to reinstate the authority of experience.

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⁵² *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 165.